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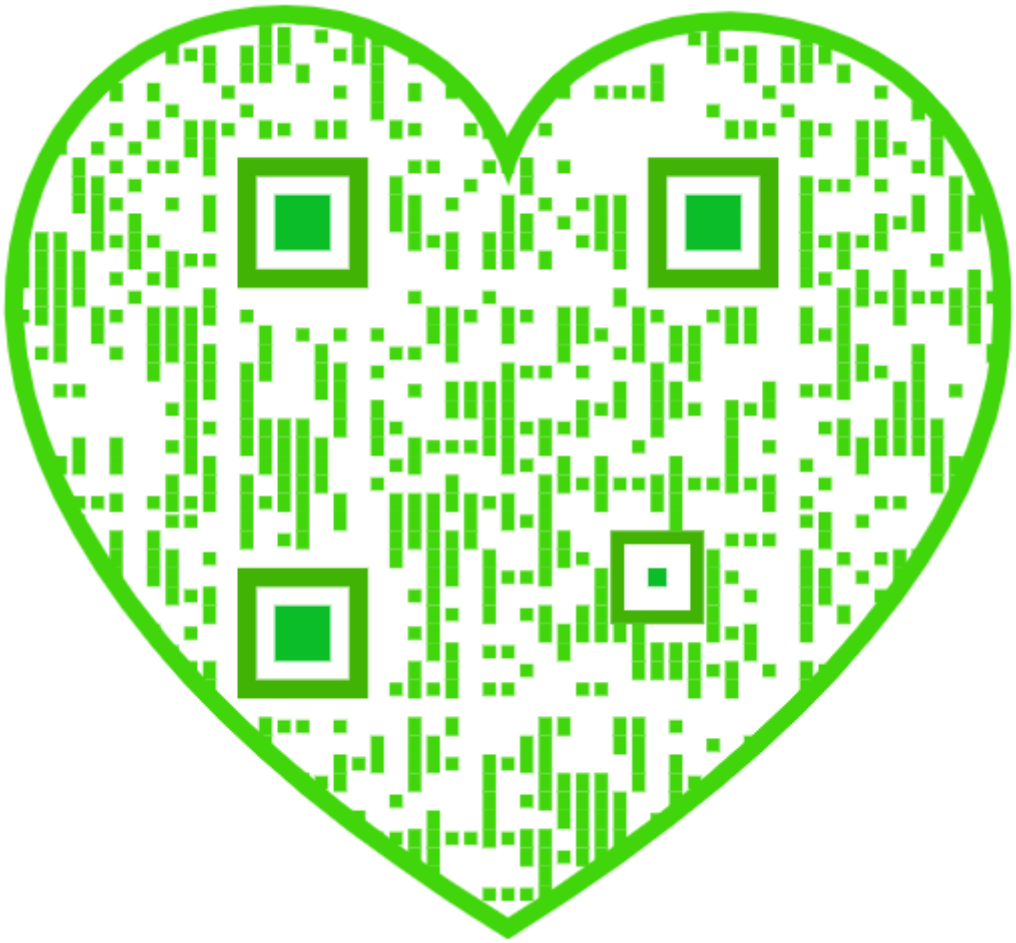
Merry Christmas.

The Shepherds' Watch



The Shepherds' Watch!

By

Rev. William Livingston.

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THE SHEPHERDS' WATCH.

Chill, wintry skies looked down on Bethlehem,
And weary pilgrims lay in slumbers deep,
While under heaven, the only roof for them,
The shepherds kept night watches with their sheep.

And weary watch it was, for wolves will prowl
Amid the shadows of the starless night,
And rest is sleepless when the jackal's howl
Scatters the flock in terror and afright.

Aye! weary watch it was, the night was dark,
The air was chill and damp with foggy rain,
The brushwood failed to catch the friendly spark,
And longed-for sleep oppressed the weary brain.

What dreams were theirs, these shepherds on the hills?
What great ambition gave them courage? None.
They watched their sheep and bore accompanying ills,
And simply prayed: Jehovah's will be done.

No dreams of wealth disturbed their soul's repose,
No wild desire where others sowed to reap;
The morning found them as the evening's close
Simple, perhaps as simple as their sheep.

And so they shivered in the chill night air,
And drew their sheepskin coats in closer fold,
Stretching their forms on branches hard and bare,
To snatch a moment from the world and cold.

But suddenly the darkness fled the sky,
The sheep sank trembling on the silvered ground.
And lo! an angel of the Lord stood by,
And brightness as of Heaven shone around.

Speechless with fear the cowering shepherds lay:
"Fear not," the angel said, "good news I bring
With joy for you; a Saviour's born to-day,
Lo! Christ is in the city of the King."

Ah! many a wintry night our hearts have known,
When sin and sorrow filled the burthened air
With wailing voices by the wild winds blown
Across the world in accents of despair.

And many a soul yet feels the evening chills
That creep around him with the gathering shade,
And looks in vain across the cheerless hills
For even a tinge of light so long delayed.

He bears, perchance, the weight of others' sins,
Perchance the crushing fault is all his own:
The dew lies dense, and deeper night begins,
He finds himself upon the fields alone.

He looks for courage from the worldly wise,
    He seeks for comfort in the ways of men;
A little light shoots out across the skies,
    And leaves him lost in deeper night again.

Where shall he turn to find the strength he needs?
    The hope to cheer him and the light to guide?
Ah! not in dreams of wild heroic deeds,
    Nor yet in drifting down a pleasure tide.

The soul that clings to God's eternal love,
    And strives, though feebly, as the days go by,
Will hear some night a voice he dreamed not of,
    And see a glory light the hopeless sky.

His heart will leap for gladness, and his feet
    Will hurry him to kneel before the shrine,
Where wrapt in adoration he may greet
    With words of tender love the Child Divine.

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